

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 LIMA 003415

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

G for Laura Lederer
G/TIP for Linda Brown
State for International Religious Freedom Office
DRL for KBrokenshire, CNewling, KCumberland, JSchechter
WHA/PD for Mary Dean Conners

STATE FOR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PE

SUBJECT: Peru's Evangelicals: Political Strategy

REF: Religious Freedom Report 2004 (draft)

1. (U) This is the second in a three-part series on Peruvian Evangelicals. It will delineate their political strategy for the upcoming presidential and congressional elections.

Summary:

2. (U) Peruvian Evangelical Christians fervently believe that Peru needs thoroughgoing moral reform if the country is to succeed. More immediately, they want the Peruvian Constitution changed to guarantee the equality of all religions before the law. Peru's Evangelicals are motivated to practice active Christian citizen participation in politics, following the examples of allies in Colombia and the U.S. They are pursuing a dual track strategy, preparing presidential campaigns, but also keeping an eye on the possible gains in Congress that even an unsuccessful presidential campaign could help bring about. According to some calculations, a united Evangelical vote could create a bloc of 5-6 Congressmen, enough to wield influence in the next legislature. End Summary.

Evangelical Christians' Issues

3. (U) Peruvian Evangelical Christian leaders are motivated by two broad issues. One is a conviction that in order to succeed as a country, Peru desperately needs moral regeneration from below. Evangelicals share many Peruvians' disappointment with democracy, the sense that democracy has not delivered and that impunity and corruption remain endemic. In their view, those recruited from their own ranks can give Peru the kind of moral regeneration it desperately needs.

4. (U) Peru's Christian Evangelicals also want to amend Article 50 of the Peruvian Constitution, which affords a special place to the Catholic Church. This provision has become the basis for a series of institutional advantages that the Catholic Church enjoys in the form of GOP favoritism in tax policy as well as exclusive official representation in schools, police and the military. Peruvian Evangelicals want a constitutional amendment that would guarantee all faiths equality before the law. For this reason (among many others) Peru's Evangelical Christians deeply admire the United States. Human Rights Officer found that the U.S. position on religious freedom was a winner in a recent presentation to Union of Peruvian Evangelicals (UNICEP) (reftel).

5. (U) Among contemporary Peruvian Evangelical Christians, there is a debate as to how best to influence politics. "Road to Life" Church leader and President of UNICEP Robert Barriger represents those who argue that the Evangelicals should shoot for representation in all of Peru's political parties, converting them from the ground up. Others maintain that only an evangelical political party that will field candidates who espouse Christian principles can bring needed change to Peru. At the moment, the latter position is gaining ground, reinforced by outside allies.

Colombia/US Seen as Models

6. (U) Peru's Evangelicals see both Colombia and the U.S. as models of Christian citizen activism, and connections between Peruvian Evangelical Christians and similar churches in both countries are strong, reinforced by regular visits and strategy and lesson-sharing.

7. (U) Pastor Cesar Castellanos of Colombia's Road to

Destiny Church recently gave a "Promise Keepers"-style sermon for 20,000 men at the National Stadium in Lima as the invited guest of Peter Hornung's "Living Waters" Church. (Hornung is one of two announced Evangelical candidates for President.) Castellano made clear his own support for Colombian President Alvaro Uribe in a meeting with Poloff. Castellano claimed that Evangelical prayers and political support had moved Uribe from number 3 in the polls to the Presidency during Uribe's 2002 campaign. Castellano put a regional spin on his political observations, telling Poloff that Latin America's Christian Evangelicals were the only ones who could stave off the rise of the Left in the region.

18. (U) Castellanos is not the only figure providing inspiration and even instruction for Peru's Evangelical Christians. In November 2004, Stephen Mansfield, a prominent Evangelical Christian lecturer and author (his works include "The Faith of George Bush" and "The Faith of the American Soldier," <http://www.mansfieldgroup.com/>) visited Peru and, in a sermon given to "Road of Life" church members and others, urged the Peruvian Evangelical Christians to blend faith with pro-active politics.

Presidential Possibilities

19. (SBU) Peruvian Evangelical Christians have two presidential candidates: Humberto Lay Sun and Peter Hornung. Lay Sun has the backing of a political party called National Restoration (NR). NR was founded in 2000 and is expected to make the required number of signatures by the October 2005 deadline to register as an official political party for the 2006 elections. Lay Sun was a member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and is considered by many to have the best chance of uniting Peru's Evangelical Christians. In addition, some supporters say -- only half jokingly -- that Lay will benefit from the "Asian advantage," an association with the Presidency of Alberto Fujimori, who is still regarded highly by many poor Peruvians as a leader who could get things done.

10. (SBU) A second Evangelical pastor, Peter Hornung, has also announced his candidacy. Hornung's campaign is less sure. He recently ran into difficulties when press reports surfaced that the party with which he was considering running was founded by supporters of former President Fujimori.

Congressional Strategy

11. (U) While presidential candidates inspire the most discussion in this pre-election year, Evangelical Christians could have a greater impact in Congress. Walter Alejos is currently the only Evangelical member of the Peruvian Congress. A former professor at the University of Huamanga in Ayacucho (where he taught with SL founder Abimail Guzman), and a former Director of the NGO World Vision in Peru, Alejos laid out the congressional strategy for the movement to Poloff.

12. (SBU) Alejos maintains that Peruvian Evangelicals could become "the third or fourth force" in Peruvian politics, based on the number of the movement's adherents. Alejos maintains that Fujimori's use of Evangelicals as well as the poor performance of some Evangelicals who participated in his government depressed the movement's appeal. (Alejos said that 17 Evangelicals entered the Congress with Fujimori, and that all failed as Congressmen.) Since the 90s, however, the number of Evangelicals in Peru has only grown, now reaching fifteen percent of the population, according to Alejos. This percentage, Alejos maintained, translates into 2.8 million votes nationwide, seven to eight hundred thousand in Lima alone. (Note: Alejos' figures for possible pro-Evangelical votes strike us as high, since not all Lima residents are of voting age. Nonetheless, his logic remains of interest. End Note.) These numbers, combined with the Evangelicals' fund-raising and outreach capabilities, could translate into 5-6 Congressional seats, a bloc big enough to wield influence beyond its numbers should the next government not/not enjoy a legislative majority.

13. (SBU) For Alejos, the seemingly long-shot presidential campaigns of evangelical leaders like Humberto Lay or Peter Hornung are less quixotic than they seem. If a presidential candidate motivates Peruvian Evangelicals to vote according to their religious beliefs, it can only benefit the Evangelicals' congressional chances.

Comment:

14. (SBU) Peruvian Evangelical Christians appear to be "getting their act together" politically, inspired by examples and friends from Colombia and the U.S. Even if their present plans do not pan out, the Evangelicals' long-term vision and determination should not be underestimated. The last cable in this series will discuss outreach to this emerging sector and possible points of convergence with the USG.

Struble